

Persecution in the Holy Land

✖ A hot topic in Israel today is evangelism, also known as proselytizing or missionary activity.

Here in Israel, it is not uncommon to take new believers to the Jordan River when they leave their religion of birth and choose Christianity. This decision is much more common among the Muslim people who are disappointed and without hope from following the god of Islam.

The truth is that when these Muslims leave Islam and embrace Christianity, they usually leave their lives of violence and hatred toward the Jewish people. Their new faith is the springboard for changing their ideology. They no longer desire to hold bitterness toward their Israeli neighbors.

Meanwhile back in their villages, if their new faith becomes known, they face a life of misery, if not death. I've personally met members of each of the following groups: those who are disowned by their families, those who have lost their jobs and have become impoverished, those who are tortured, and those who have been murdered.

Despite this maltreatment, the believers in Christ maintain their new-found faith as their most valuable treasure. Their only desire is to spread the Good News among those they love, and to tell of a God who loves and cares for them personally. They want others to find and experience the same peace they found in Jesus.

Also here in Israel, there are Jews who choose to follow Jesus (Yeshuah) as their Messiah. They too make this decision at a high price. If their conversion becomes known, they may lose their families, their jobs or their homes. Regardless of the consequences, they hold firmly to their faith.

There has recently been an increase in threats and attacks on

Messianic Jews. In some cases the attacks have left some people disabled or maimed, and structures have been vandalized, firebombed or destroyed. Tires have been slashed and people have been spit on. Just as the Jewish people were attacked 2000 years ago for following Jesus, Jewish Believers today are attacked for the same reason.

So why can't people in Israel and the West Bank find freedom of religion like we experience in the Western World? The laws actually do give citizens the freedom of religion, both in Israel and in the West Bank. The problem is that those who have the authority to uphold the laws of the land do not always agree with them. This is what makes it difficult for citizens to live and practice their faith in freedom.

For many years, religious persecution has not been an important topic here in Israel, but as the attacks continue to increase, it is beginning to surface more and more. We need to call it what it is. Today people are living under persecution in the 'Holy Land', but many are afraid to speak out.

In Islam (the dominant religion in Gaza and the West Bank,) it is unlawful to become a Christian and can be punishable by death. Converts are referred to as traitors to Islam. The Palestinian leadership has actually sided with Islam against their own 'Democratic' laws and has been known to torture and murder Christian converts. The citizens are trapped in fear.

In Israel, the law states that proselytizing minors is against the law; offering money or other benefits as enticement for one to change their religion is also illegal, but the law permits all other missionary activity. In Israel, the law protects freedom of religion but still persecution often dissuades the people from embracing their freedom.

We all have a choice in this world, and whether our choice is known or hidden there is not a sole attack or incident that can change the heart. But persecution surely can change and

damage a life.

The Jewish people have sung their national anthem, Ha Tikvah, (The Hope), for many years. Their hope and dream was to find a homeland so they no longer would be abused and persecuted for being who they are. Their dream was finally realized in May of 1948, when Israel became a Nation. My hope is that all people of Israel including the West Bank and Gaza will one day have that same freedom to be who and what they choose to be.